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ABSTRACT

The fourth statewide administration of Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Mathematics took place in the spring of 1999. The first administration of the statewide Test of Written Composition for 10th graders also took place in 1999. Beginning with the class of 2000, students are required to pass these tests by the time they complete 12th grade in order to receive a high school diploma. This report examines the participation and performance of students with disabilities since the first statewide administration in 1996, across grades 8 through 11. Results from the examination indicate: (1) the participation of 8th grade students with disabilities on the 1999 Basic Standards Tests stands at 90 percent; (2) by 11th grade, over a fourth of the students with disabilities had not yet passed the tests and took them again, some for at least the fifth time; (3) the performance of 8th graders with disabilities has decreased slightly on the mathematics test across each of the 4 years of testing, with only 27 percent in 1999 passing; and (4) the passing rate for 8th graders with disabilities was higher on the reading test than the mathematics test. Appendices include federal requirements for assessment participation. (CR)

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STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 29

1999 Report on the Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

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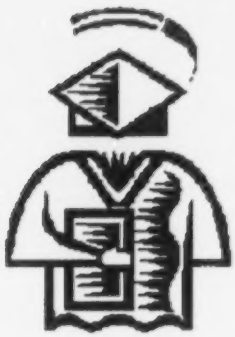

The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards. Specifically, the project will examine ways in which students with limited English and students with disabilities can participate in the Basic Standards Exams of reading, mathematics and written composition and in the performance-based assessments of the high standards in the Profile of Learning.

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Overview

The fourth statewide administration of Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Mathematics took place in the spring of 1999. The first administration of the statewide Test of Written Composition for 10th graders also took place in 1999. Beginning with the class of 2000 (11th graders during 1999 testing), students are required to pass these tests by the time they complete 12th grade in order to receive a high school diploma (there are exceptions for some students with disabilities). This report examines the participation and performance of students with disabilities on the Basic Standards Tests since the first statewide administration in 1996, across grades 8 through 11. Data used in this report were compiled by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning and analyzed by the Minnesota Assessment Project, a collaborative effort between the Department of Children, Families and Learning and the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota.

The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97) requires states to report the number and percentage of students participating in state assessments and the performance of those students in the same way and with the same frequency as reported for other students. IDEA 97 has placed greater emphasis on the access of students with disabilities to the general education curriculum and their participation in it, and in the district and state assessments that drive the curriculum. In Minnesota, as in most states, IDEA has set the stage for higher participation rates (see Appendix A for assessment provisions of IDEA 97).

Minnesota is one of only 23 states able to report actual assessment participation rates of students with disabilities (Thompson & Thurlow, 1999). Many states do not yet have the capacity to disaggregate statewide assessment data by disability and if they do, they may not be able to calculate the percentage of students with disabilities actually participating in their assessments. Although assessments have been the primary means to evaluate educational accountability, students with disabilities continue to be excluded to a great extent in many states (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998). As will be shown in this report, school districts across Minnesota are to be commended for including over 90% of eighth graders with disabilities in state testing in 1999.

Background Information about Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Mathematics were administered statewide for the first time in 1996. Districts could choose whether to participate in the first testing year. In 1997, participation in testing was required, but districts could choose to use the state-issued tests or different tests. In 1998, all districts were required to give the state tests in both Reading and Mathematics beginning in 8th grade. The Test of Written Composition was initially

administered in 1999 for students in 10th grade. All state public high school students entering 9th grade in 1997 or later must pass these tests before graduation. Those in the class of 2000 need 70% of the test items correct to pass, while others will need 75%. Local public school districts may set higher passing scores for their students. In addition to the Basic Standards Tests, students in the class of 2002 (tenth graders in school year 1999-2000) will be required to complete a set of 24 high standards within 10 learning areas to receive a high school diploma.

There are three levels of participation allowed on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests for students with Individualized Educational Programs or 504 Accommodation Plans. Students can either take the state tests as generally administered, with accommodations as needed (see list of approved accommodations in Appendix B), take a modified version of the tests and receive the notation "pass-individual" on their high school transcript, or be exempt from testing all together. The Minnesota Rule describing the participation of students with IEPs and 504 plans can be found in Appendix C. As of July 1, 2000, students who were previously exempt from testing will be included through the provision of alternate assessments (see Appendix A).

Method

The Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning collected the data compiled for this report through the MARSS accounting system. Descriptive statistical analyses were then run on these data by Minnesota Assessment Project researchers. Finally, the analyses were translated into tables for discussion in this report. Information contained in this report was reviewed by special education and assessment consultants at the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

In the past, there were many students whose test scores could not be accounted for through the state system, because they had missing or inaccurate ID numbers or changes in their names or locations from year to year. (For example, one year a student might be listed as Steve Michaels, the next year Stephen Michaels, and maybe the next year, Michael Stevens!) The data collection system has been refined to the point that, in 1999, less than 200 of the nearly 200,000 students tested have yet to be identified within the system. This is a monumental task, and leaders of the Data Management Team at the Department of Children, Families and Learning are to be highly commended for their careful and accurate work.

Important Considerations

There are several important considerations in the interpretation of the data presented in this report. These considerations fall into six areas: reporting by primary disability; students with Section 504 accommodation plans, date of child count, additional testing opportunities, modifications and exemptions, and other considerations.

Reporting by primary disability. Unduplicated child count data are essential for calculating participation rates—these data become the denominator. Even though many students have multiple disabling conditions, in order to reduce duplication of students, only a student's primary disability is reported. It is important to keep this caution in mind, since a student's secondary disability (e.g., learning disability) may affect test scores more than his or her primary disability (e.g., speech impairment). In other words, generalizations or conclusions about participation or performance cannot be based simply on disability category.

Students with Section 504 accommodation plans. Some students are recognized as having disabilities under another federal law—Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In the past, only students receiving special education services were included in these analyses. This year, we have added the participation and performance of students with 504 accommodation plans. The numbers are low, however, possibly indicating that some students are not reported as having 504 plans, or that some students who could benefit from 504 accommodation plans do not have them. In this report, the designation "students with disabilities" includes students with 504 accommodation plans in addition to those receiving special education services.

Date of child count. In previous years, the number of students with disabilities who were eligible for testing was determined through child count information reported to the U.S. Department of Special Education Programs on December 1. This count was taken at least three months before the actual testing date. Enrollment data for the 1999 tests were updated on the test administration day, conceivably making it more accurate, since student attrition is not a factor. The slight change in enrollment is shown in Table 1.

Additional testing opportunities. School districts across Minnesota have an additional opportunity to administer Basic Standards Tests in mid July to students who did not pass the previous spring. Results of summer test administration are not included in this analysis.

Modifications and exemptions. Data for this report include test scores, with "passing" defined as a score at or above 75% (70% for students in the class of 2000). We do not have information about students who were administered modified tests. In other words, if a Reading test was read to a student and the student scored 78%, we have no way of knowing that the test was modified, so we simply included the "78%" with all other test scores. We also do not have information

Table 1. Change in Enrollment from Dec. 1 Child Count to Test Day

Disability Category	Dec. 1 Child Count	Day of Test Enrollment
Learning Disability	4288	4141
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	2092	1994
Speech Impairment	776	517
Other Health Impairment	652	641
Mild/Moderate Mental Impairment	632	597
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	166	180
Visual Impairment	34	28
Physical Impairment	102	104
Autism	95	80
Moderate/Severe Mental Impairment	200	156

about the number of students who were formally exempt from testing; all we know is the number of students who were not tested (for whatever reason). These designations will be made at the district level on a student's final transcript.

Other considerations. Other reporting considerations include the ongoing possibility of errors in data. There are now about 1.2 million fields in the MARRS reporting system. As explained above, the number of errors is far fewer than in initial testing years, but no system recording human performance can be error free. Another consideration is that there are some students who are included in the child count who are not tested because they receive their education in private or home-schools. Finally, to protect the privacy of students, the participation and performance of groups with less than 10 students are not reported. Cells in the tables in this report with fewer than 10 students contain the designation "<10".

Results

Because there are so many ways to look at data across four years of testing, we have chosen to take several different "snapshots" of findings. We decided to examine trends both within a single grade each year (8th graders from 1996 to 1999) and for a cohort of students from 8th grade through graduation (class of 2000). We also wanted to examine the data by disability category, but found it too cumbersome to look at all disabilities across all grades and years. We found that our "snapshot" of 8th graders in 1999 reflected similar trends across disabilities in

other grades and years, so those are the data included in this report. Since the test of Written Composition was administered for the first time in 1999, we wanted to show the participation and performance of 10th graders representing all disability categories on this test. Finally, 1999 was the first year data were collected on accommodations with enough clarity to be reported, so these data are also included in this report. In summary, the "snapshots" examined in the following section include:

- Participation of 8th graders from 1996 to 1999.
- Participation of the class of 2000.
- Participation of the 8th graders tested in 1999, by disability.
- Performance of 8th graders from 1996 to 1999.
- Performance of the class of 2000.
- Performance of the 8th graders tested in 1999, by disability.
- Participation and performance of 10th graders on the 1999 Test of Written Composition.
- Testing accommodations used in 1999.

Participation of 8th Graders from 1996 to 1999

The participation of 8th grade students with disabilities on the 1999 Basic Standards Tests stands at 90%, the highest yet in the State of Minnesota, and one of the highest large-scale test participation rates of students with disabilities in the country (Thompson & Thurlow, 1999). As shown in Figure 1, this compares to an overall participation rate of 96% for all students. If students with disabilities are removed from the picture, the overall participation rate increases to 97%.

Table 2 shows participation rates for 8th graders with disabilities in Mathematics and Reading since testing began statewide in 1996. As stated previously, districts were not required to use state-issued tests in 1996 or 1997. This, in addition to the newness of the tests, may partially account for the lower participation rates in those years.

Participation of the Class of 2000

Students in the class of 2000 are the first to be required to receive a passing score on the Basic Standards Tests in order to receive a diploma. For this group only, the passing score was set at 70%. Since 1996 was the first testing year, many 8th graders were not tested, so the number of 9th graders tested for the first time in 1997 that still had not taken the test was high (see Table 3). Also, the passing rates in 1996, as will be seen later in this report, were lower than in later years, which may also have contributed to higher participation rates for 9th graders in 1997. Of the 9th

Figure 1. 1998 and 1999 Test Participation Rates

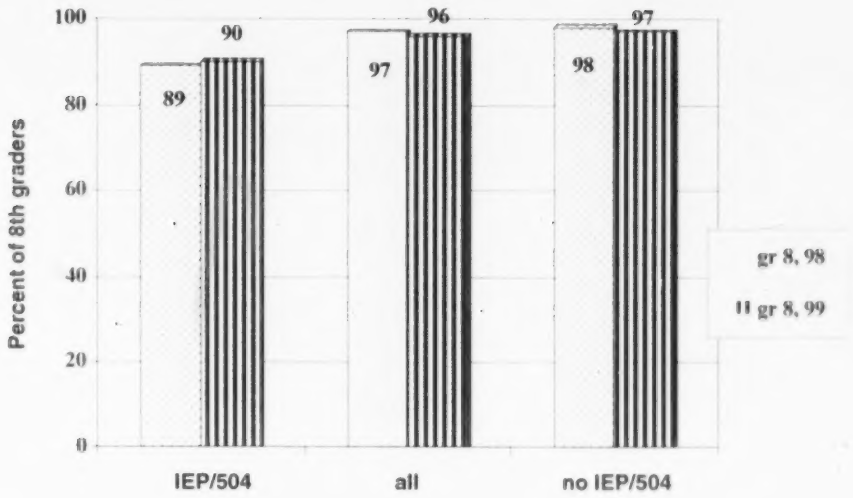

Table 2. Participation of 8th Graders in Basic Standards Tests from 1996 to 1999

	Child Count	No. Tested Math	Percent Tested Math	No. Tested Reading	Percent Tested Reading
1996 8th graders with disabilities	8846	6256	71	6132	69
1996 8th graders without disabilities	56801	47350	83	45648	80
1997 8th graders with disabilities	8022	4725	59	4620	58
1997 8th graders without disabilities	57912	47204	82	45766	79
1998 8th graders with disabilities	8426	7522	89	7529	89
1998 8th graders without disabilities	58100	56874	98	56872	98
1999 8th graders with disabilities	8576	7711	90	7708	90
1999 8th graders without disabilities	59357	57651	97	57697	97

Table 3. Participation of Students in the Class of 2000

	Child Count	No. Tested Math	Percent Tested Math	No. Tested Reading	Percent Tested Reading
1996 8th graders with disabilities	8846	6256	71	6132	69
1996 8th graders without disabilities	56801	47350	83	45648	80
1997 9th graders with disabilities	7649	3427	45	3862	50
1997 9th graders without disabilities	60945	13711	22	17449	27
1998 10th graders with disabilities	7360	2794	38	3330	45
1998 10th graders without disabilities	61056	6059	10	8483	14
1999 11th graders with disabilities	7288	1901	26	1915	26
1999 11th graders without disabilities	58838	3767	6	3893	7

graders without disabilities, 22% were tested in Mathematics and 27% in Reading. The percentage of 9th graders with disabilities tested was much higher, about double that of their nondisabled peers; 45% in Mathematics and 50% in Reading. In 10th grade, the percent of students without disabilities tested dropped to 10% in Mathematics and 14% in Reading, and by 11th grade only 6% of the students without disabilities were tested in Mathematics and 7% in Reading. The number of students with disabilities tested did not drop as quickly, however. In 10th grade, 38% of the students with disabilities were tested in Mathematics and 45% were tested in Reading. By 11th grade over a fourth of the students with disabilities had not yet passed the tests (26% tested in Mathematics and Reading) and took them again, some for at least the fifth time (since summer testing was offered in several districts).

8th Grade Participation by Disability

Participation varied little across most disability categories. In 1999, 8th grade test participation was 96% for students with 504 accommodation plans, and at least 90% for students receiving special education services across six categories (see Table 4). The percentages of students participating in reading or math (whichever was highest) were: speech impairments (97%),

Table 4. 1998 8th Grade Participation by Disability

	Child Count	No. tested Math	Percent tested Math	No. tested Reading	Percent Tested Reading
All students	67933	65361	96	65405	96
Students without Disabilities	59357	57651	97	57697	97
Students with Disabilities	8576	7711	90	7708	90
504 Accommodation Plan	115	110	96	109	95
Speech Impairment	517	495	96	499	97
Visual Impairment	28	27	96	26	93
Specific Learning Disability	4141	3913	94	3914	95
Other Health Impairment	641	601	94	596	93
Emotional/Behavior Disorder	1994	1809	91	1814	91
Traumatic Brain Injury	22	20	91	19	86
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	180	152	84	149	83
Physical Impairment	104	86	83	86	83
Mild/Moderate Mental Impairment	597	437	73	433	73
Autism	80	50	66	54	68
Moderate/Severe Mental Impairment	156	10	6	<10	<10

visual impairments (96%); learning disabilities (95%); other health impairments (94%), emotional/ behavioral disorders (91%), and traumatic brain injuries (91%). Students representing other disability categories participated at a lower rate, with very few students with moderate to severe mental impairments tested (<10%).

Performance of 8th Graders from 1996 to 1999

Beginning with the class of 2001, students need to complete 75% of the test items correctly on both the Reading and Mathematics tests in order to meet the passing level. Future cohorts will be required to pass the Test of Written Composition in addition, and will be required to meet

high standards as well. The performance of 8th graders without disabilities has increased in Reading from 69% passing at the 70% level in 1996 to 81% passing at the 75% level in 1999 (see Figure 2), and remained fairly stable across the four testing years in Mathematics (see Figure 3). The performance of students with disabilities has decreased slightly on the Mathematics test across each of the four years of testing, with only 27% of the 8th graders with disabilities who were tested in 1999 passing, compared to 76% of their peers without disabilities (see Table 5).

Figure 2. Percent of 8th Graders Passing Reading—1997 through 1999

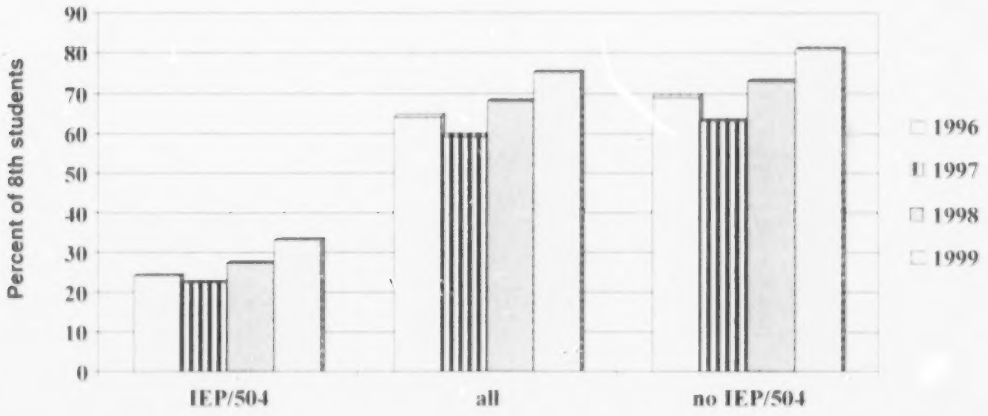

Figure 3. Percent of 8th Graders Passing Mathematics—1997 through 1999

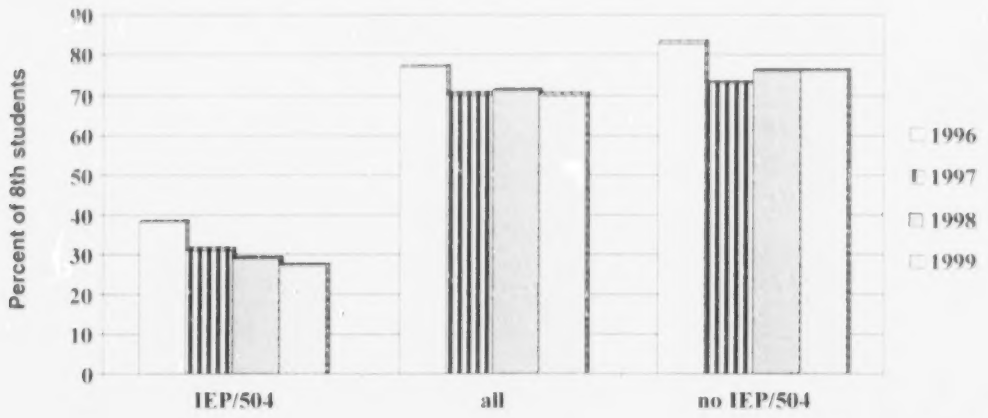

Table 5. Performance of 8th Graders from 1996 to 1999

	No. Tested Math	No. Passing Math	Percent Passing Math	No. Tested Reading	No. Passing Reading	Percent Passing Reading
1996 8th graders with disabilities	6256	2352	38	6132	1476	24
1996 8th graders without disabilities	47350	39110	83	45648	31645	69
1997 8th graders with disabilities	4725	1463	31	4620	1016	22
1997 8th graders without disabilities	47204	34629	73	45766	28744	63
1998 8th graders with disabilities	7522	2193	29	7529	2054	27
1998 8th graders without disabilities	56874	43296	76	56872	41757	73
1999 8th graders with disabilities	7711	2096	27	7708	2545	33
1999 8th graders without disabilities	57651	43815	76	57697	46635	81

Performance of the Class of 2000

As would be expected, each year the number of students in the class of 2000 still working on passing the Basic Standards Tests becomes significantly smaller. For students without disabilities who were tested, 83% passed the Mathematics test and 60% passed the Reading test as 8th graders. Of the students tested in 9th grade, the passing rate dropped to 55% in Mathematics and 51% in Reading. About half of the students without disabilities tested in 10th grade passed and about half of the 11th graders tested also passed. This leaves 2,000 to 2,500 students to be tested in the summer following their junior year, or during their senior year in order to receive a diploma and graduate with the rest of their class.

Students with disabilities, however, have not fared quite as well (see Table 6). Only 38% of the 8th graders passed the Mathematics test, and 24% passed the Reading test. The number of students remaining to be tested dropped each year, along with the percent passing. By 11th grade, of the 1,900 students tested, only 13% passed the Mathematics test and 28% passed the Reading test. This leaves about 1,500 to 2,000 students with disabilities who need to pass the tests during the summer after their junior year or sometime during their senior year in order to graduate at a "pass state" level. Students with disabilities, however, have an option of passing a test with

Table 6. Performance of Students in the Class of 2000

	No. Tested Math	No. Passing Math	Percent Passing Math	No. Tested Reading	No. Passing Reading	Percent Passing Reading
1996 8th graders with disabilities	6256	2352	38	6132	1476	24
1996 8th graders without disabilities	47350	39110	83	45648	31645	69
1997 9th graders with disabilities	3427	669	20	3863	634	16
1997 9th graders without disabilities	13711	7526	55	17449	8854	51
1998 10th graders with disabilities	2794	502	18	3330	1016	31
1998 10th graders without disabilities	6059	2582	43	8483	5001	59
1999 11th graders with disabilities	1901	238	13	1915	534	28
1999 11th graders without disabilities	3767	1452	39	3893	2101	56

modifications, that is, with changes in the test or allowances for "passing" with a score set below 70%. Students with disabilities in the class of 2000 can also be exempt from testing. In the future, students who have previously been exempt from testing will participate in a state designed alternate assessment.

8th Grade Performance by Disability

Tables 7 and 8 show the performance of 8th graders on the Basic Standards Tests in Mathematics and Reading by disability category. Overall, 27% of all 8th graders with disabilities tested passed the Mathematics test. However, students with 504 accommodation plans and students representing seven disability categories passed at a higher rate: 504 accommodation plans (43% passed) speech impairments (46% passed), visual impairments (41% passed), deaf/hard of hearing (38% passed), autism (38% passed), other health impairments (32% passed), emotional/behavioral disorders (31% passed), and physical impairments (27% passed). Students representing the remaining four disability groups, passed at a rate of less than 25%: specific learning disabilities (24% passing), traumatic brain injury (20% passing), mild/moderate mental impairments (1% passing), and moderate/severe mental impairments (0 passing).

Table 7. 1998 8th Grade Performance in Mathematics by Disability

	No. tested Math	Mean Percent items correct	No. passing Math	Percent passing Math
All Students	65361	79.1	45911	70
Students without Disabilities	57651	82.0	43815	76
Students with Disabilities	7710	57.1	2096	27
Speech Impairment	495	67.5	227	46
504 Accommodation Plan	110	66.6	47	43
Visual Impairment	27	62.5	11	41
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	152	61.8	57	38
Autism	50	60.5	19	38
Other Health Impairment	601	59.8	191	32
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	1809	59.7	561	31
Physical Impairment	86	57.5	23	27
Specific Learning Disability	3913	56.9	952	24
Traumatic Brain Injury	20	56.1	<10	20
Mild/Moderate Mental Impairment	437	30.8	<10	1
Moderate/Severe Mental Impairment	<10	28.2	<10	0

The passing rate for 8th graders with disabilities was higher on the Reading test than the Mathematics test, with a 33% passing rate overall. As with the Mathematics test, students with 504 accommodation plans and students representing seven disability categories passed the Reading test at a higher rate: 504 accommodation plans (56% passed), physical impairments (52% passed), autism (50% passed), visual impairments (48% passed), speech impairments (45% passed), deaf/hard of hearing (45% passed), emotional/behavioral disorders (41% passed), and other health impairments (39% passed). Students representing the remaining four disability groups passed at a rate of less than 30%: specific learning disabilities (29% passing), traumatic brain injury (20% passing), mild/moderate mental impairments (1% passing), and moderate/severe mental impairments (0 passing).

Table 8. 1998 8th Grade Performance in Reading by Disability

	No. tested Reading	Mean Percent items correct	No. passing Reading	Percent passing Reading
All students	65405	81.0	49180	75
Students without Disabilities	57697	83.7	46635	81
Students with Disabilities	7708	60.6	2545	33
504 Accommodation Plan	109	73.4	62	56
Visual Impairment	26	70.2	13	48
Physical Impairment	86	68.6	45	52
Speech Impairment	499	68.5	224	45
Autism	54	66.4	25	50
Other Health Impairment	596	65.4	236	39
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	149	65.0	68	45
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	1814	64.9	743	41
Specific Learning Disability	3914	59.1	1120	29
Traumatic Brain Injury	19	54.8	<10	20
Mild/Moderate Mental Impairment	433	36.3	<10	1
Moderate/Severe Mental Impairment	<10	28.0	<10	0

Participation and Performance on the Test of Written Composition

1999 was the first year that all Minnesota public school 10th graders were required to be tested in written composition. Scores were based on the overall quality of a written composition with results scored across four performance levels:

More than adequate composition (4)	Meets state standard (passing)
Adequate composition (3 or 3.5)	Meets state standard (passing)
Inadequate composition (2)	Below state standard (not passing)
Very inadequate composition (1 or 1.5)	Below state standard (not passing)

In order to meet the state standard, student compositions were required to be related to the assigned topic and have a clear central idea, with some supporting detail and development. Compositions needed to be well organized with only minor errors in mechanics or spelling.

About 10% fewer students with disabilities were tested in Written Composition (79%) than in Reading (90%) or Mathematics (90%). This rate was about 15% lower than the participation rate of students without disabilities (94%). Students with 504 accommodation plans were tested in Written Composition at a rate nearly as high as that of students without disabilities (93%). Students representing four disability categories participated at rates higher than 80% (see Table 9), including: visual impairments (90%), other health impairments (88%), specific learning disabilities (84%), and deaf/hard of hearing (83%). Students from all other disability groups

Table 9. 1999 10th Grade Participation and Performance on the Test of Written Composition

	Child Count	No. Tested Writing	Percent Tested Writing	Mean performance level (1-4)
All Students	68411	63112	92	3.1
Students without Disabilities	60167	56566	94	3.2
Students with Disabilities	8244	6546	79	2.4
504 Accommodation Plan	138	129	93	2.8
Visual Impairment	20	18	90	3.0
Other Health Impairment	508	445	88	2.6
Specific Learning Disability	3725	3120	84	2.4
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	143	119	83	2.5
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	2202	1632	74	2.6
Physical Impairment	107	70	65	2.9
Traumatic Brain Injury	23	15	65	2.6
Mild/Moderate Mental Impairment	635	371	58	2.0
Speech Impairment	444	205	46	2.6
Autism	69	32	46	2.5
Moderate/Severe Mental Impairment	229	<10	3	1.7

participated in the test of Written Composition at a rate of less than 75%, with the smallest number of participants being students with moderate/severe mental impairments.

About 90% of the 10th grade test takers without disabilities passed the test of Written Composition at a performance level of 3 or 4. Forty-one percent of the 10th grade test takers with disabilities reached these performance levels. The mean performance level of students without disabilities on the test of Written Composition was 3.1. The mean performance level of students with disabilities ranged from 3.0 (students with visual impairments) to 1.7 (students with moderate/severe mental impairments). The performance levels of students with 504 accommodation plans and students representing each disability category are shown in Table 9.

Discussion

Participation of students with disabilities in Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests has been maintained at a high rate over four years. At the same time, there has been general low performance of these students on the tests. This remains a critical concern. As testing continues over the next few years, there are several important issues to address and areas to continue to improve. This discussion focuses on four of these issues: increased referrals for special education and Section 504 accommodation services, lack of coordination in the use of test accommodations, overuse of alternate assessments by students who could participate in the general assessments, and inequitable access to instruction toward high standards for students with disabilities. Each of these issues is addressed below.

Increased Referrals for Special Education and Section 504 Accommodation Services

Watch for increased referrals for special education and 504 accommodation services by students, parents, and teachers looking for ways to graduate students who do not pass the Basic Standards Tests. At this time, there are little data available across the state to show any recent change in referral rates for these services, and in districts where data are available, referral rates at the high school level have not increased (Minnema, Thompson, Thurlow, & Barrow, 2000). Whether this finding indicates that there really will not be increased referrals, or that there will not be in places that collect data and track referral rates is unknown. Still, this is an area that needs to be watched carefully over the next few years. New referrals at the high school level may not be all bad news, however, as long as the numbers do not become large. There may be students who should have been receiving special education services all along, and who "slipped through the cracks" by not receiving the help they needed. With statewide testing, individual needs that may have been missed along the way could be brought to light.

Lack of Coordination in the Use of Test Accommodations

There is evidence that making decisions about needed accommodations and actually providing accommodations is still an emerging area (Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, & Karns, in press; Thompson & Thurlow, 1999). As the use of test accommodations among students with disabilities increases, it will be important to improve information and coordination at five important stages:

1. Students need many opportunities to discover how they learn best and which accommodations are most helpful for them in testing, instructional, and general life settings.

2. Accommodations need to be addressed by each student's IEP or 504 team, recorded on the IEP or 504 accommodation plan, and updated at least annually.

3. Students need to be able to advocate for the accommodations they need across all life settings.

4. Accommodations listed on each student's IEP or 504 accommodation plan need to be documented on a district-wide database that is used for ordering special test booklets (i.e., short-segment, large print) and used by test administrators to make sure that students get needed accommodations on test day.

5. There needs to be a way to compile a list of the number of students who actually used each accommodation for each test. This list needs to be aggregatable at the state level in order to make more informed decisions about allowable testing accommodations and policies statewide.

Overuse of Alternate Assessments by Students Who Could Participate in General Assessments

There is some concern that once the alternate assessment is in place and as students reach the point in their school careers where they still have not passed tests at the "state level," a number of students who may be able to participate in the general assessment will be placed in the alternate assessment instead. Some believe that students should not be "forced" to take tests that no one thinks they will do well on anyway. Others fear that including students with potentially low scores will make schools, programs, or teachers "look bad." At this time, it is estimated that no more than two percent of all students at a grade level (15 to 20 percent of students with disabilities) will participate in alternate assessments. If this level begins creeping up, it will be important to look at the reasons why and address the issues surrounding those reasons.

Inequitable Access to Instruction Toward High Standards for Students with Disabilities

There is some concern that students who perform poorly in basic academic areas need extra instruction in separate settings by special educators, at the expense of important instruction toward high standards. Schools that are successfully including students with disabilities in instruction toward high standards have found that good support in general education settings, with accommodations as needed, and lots of hands-on, practical instruction, raises expectations that students with disabilities can meet high standards (Thompson, Thurlow, Parson, & Barrow, 2000).

Summary

Many important gains have been made in the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests. These gains, along with ongoing discussion about tough issues and challenges, have propelled Minnesota closer to the important goal of having an inclusive accountability system, a system that truly "measures what we treasure." For this reason, it will be critical to continue to compile and report annually on the participation and performance of students with disabilities on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests. Beyond reporting, it will also be essential to carefully evaluate the meaning and implications of the data.

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Appendix A

IDEA Requirements: Participation in Assessment

IDEA Requirements

Participation in Assessment

Section 612 – State Eligibility (a) (17)

(A) in general

Children with disabilities are included in general State and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations, where necessary. As appropriate, the State or local educational agency –

(i) develops guidelines for participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in State and district-wide assessment programs; and

(ii) develops and, beginning not later than July 1, 2000, conducts those alternate assessments.

(B) Reports

The State educational agency makes available to the public, and reports to the public with the same frequency and in the same detail as it reports on the assessment of nondisabled children, the following:

(i) the number of children with disabilities participating I regular assessments,

(ii) the number of those children participating in alternate assessments

(iii) (I) the performance of those children on regular assessments (beginning not later than July 1, 1998) and on alternate assessment (not later than July 1, 2000), if doing so would be statistically sound and would not result in the disclosure of performance results identifiable to individual children.

(II) data relating to the performance of children described under subclause (I) shall be disaggregated –

(aa) for assessments conducted after July 1, 1998; and

(bb) for assessments conducted before July 1, 1998, if the State is required to disaggregate such data prior to July 1, 1998.

Section 614 – Individualized education program

The term 'individualized education program' or 'IEP' means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with this section and that includes –

(v) (I) a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of State or districtwide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in such assessment; and

(II) if the IEP Team determines that the child will not participate in a particular State or districtwide assessment of student achievement (or part of such an assessment), a statement of –

(aa) why that assessment is not appropriate for the child; and

(bb) how the child will be assessed.

Appendix B

Accommodations Allowed on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

Accommodations Allowed on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

Guidelines for accommodations:
An accommodation is defined as any change in testing conditions which does not alter the validity or reliability of the state standard. Accommodations may not compromise the security of the test and should be consistent with the goals of the student's IEP or 504 plan. Students who have accommodations will have their tests scored according to state scoring procedures.

Typically, accommodations allow a change in one or more of the following areas:

- presentation format
- test setting
- scheduling or timing
- response format

Since the testing requirements vary, not every accommodation is appropriate or permitted for every test. Specific accommodations are indicated for specific subject areas. Accommodations, which require alternate test booklets, testing materials or special handling, are noted. Alternate materials must be requested on the Statewide Testing Registration/Order form.

When selecting accommodations for students, IEP or 504 teams should consider the needs of the student in daily instructional situations as well as any additional needs that might arise in a secure testing situation. **Students may require multiple accommodations such as interpreted directions and extended time.** The following is a suggested list of accommodations. If you wish to provide an accommodation not listed, please check with either the division of Special Education or the Office of Graduation Standards at the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Accommodation	Test
Directions may be given in any format necessary to accommodate students (signing, auditory amplification, repeating, etc.) Test administrators must use the script in the testing manual to explain the task to students. They will not be allowed to go beyond the script in giving or clarifying directions. Directions are found in the test administration manual. These are non-secure documents and may be received prior to test administration.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Large-print is an enlarged copy of the test. Students who use the large-print edition will be allowed to mark their answers on the large-print test booklets. (Large print is in Times Roman and is available in 14, 18, 24 and 36-point font size.) Answers must be transferred to a scannable answer sheet by school testing personnel. Transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of the school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition** *Special Order Materials
Braille versions of all tests are available to students who are blind or partially sighted, and are trained in this system. Student responses may be recorded in one of the following ways: • recorded by a proctor, • marked in the booklet by the student, • recorded with a typewriter or word processor, • dictated to a scribe, or • recorded by the student using a Braillewriter or a slate and stylus. A copy of Braille tests will be provided in regular print to test administrators or proctors working with students at the time of testing. Answers must be transferred to a scannable answer sheet by school testing personnel. Transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of the school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition** *Special Order Materials
Magnification or low vision aids may be used by visually impaired students to read tests.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Templates to reduce visual print field may be used by students to read tests.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Audiocassettes may be provided for students who have difficulty with printed words or numbers and/or who acquire knowledge primarily through the auditory channel. (Materials must be ordered separately). Note: Cassettes should be ordered for each student and administered using headphones or in individual stations.	**Mathematics** *Special Order Materials
A script of the audio cassette may be provided for testing personnel to read or interpret the Mathematics test for any student who has difficulty with printed words or numbers and for whom the audio cassette is not appropriate.	**Mathematics** *Special Order Materials
Interpretation of the Mathematics test may be provided for deaf or hard of hearing students. The audiocassette or the audiocassette script must be used for interpreting as it has been carefully prepared to maintain the validity of the test. Only literal interpretation of the script is acceptable as an accommodation.	**Mathematics** *Special Order Materials
Large print answer booklets may be provided for students who, due to the size of their handwriting, require more space for Written Composition.	**Written Composition** *Special Order Materials
Short segment test booklets may be ordered for students who are unable to take the entire test in one sitting. These tests may be administered only on the official date during the designated instructional test day. (These are only available for the Basic Standards Test.)	**Mathematics** **Reading** *Special Order Materials

Accommodation	Test
Extended time may be provided to any student. While each test has a suggested amount of time for test administration, there is no limit to the amount of time a student may be allowed with in the officially designated instructional test day. Every student should be given sufficient time to respond to every test item.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Individual or small group administration may be provided to students who may need to take a test alone in a room or with a small group of students. For example, students who will need additional time, use an audiocassette version of the Mathematics, etc. should be allowed to test in a separate room.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Special settings may be provided for students. tests may be administered in rooms with special lighting, acoustics, or furniture to accommodate needs.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Testing time during instructional day may be adjusted according to the needs of the student. Students may test at any time during the officially designated instructional test day.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**

Alternate Response Formats

Accommodation	Test
BrailleWriters may be used by students who are trained to use them. Since BrailleWriters include "spellcheckers" which cannot be removed from the machine, a monitor must verify that the student has not activated this portion of the BrailleWriter program. Answers must be transferred to a scannable answer sheet by school testing personnel. Transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Word processors or similar assistive devices may be used if the IEP or 504 team determines it would be appropriate. Students may not have access to the following features of word processing programs: spell check, thesaurus, grammar check, or other reference or preparation materials. Student responses to the Test of Written Composition, which are produced by word processors, must be attached to the scannable Writing booklet. Personal information must be filled in by testing personnel in the district. (Answer documents require special handling for return to NCS.) Answers for the Reading and Mathematics tests must be transferred to a scannable answer booklet by school personnel. Transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Voice-activated computers may be used by students who are trained to use them. Students may not have access to the following features of word processing programs: spell check, thesaurus, grammar check, or other reference or preparation materials. For the test of Written Composition, dictated spelling and punctuation must be verified by the student author. Students must spell out every word and give punctuation for a scribe to write following the dictation of the composition. Scribes must be impartial and should be experienced in transcription. They must write EXACTLY what the student dictates. Students may be given scripted responses for editing purposes. Student responses to the test of Written Composition, which are produced by voice-activated computers, must be attached to the scannable Writing booklet. Answers for the Reading and Mathematics tests must be transferred to a scannable answer sheet by school personnel. Personal information must be filled in by testing personnel in the district. Transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers.	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**

Writing directly in the test booklet is permitted for any student. For example, students may wish to use a highlighter on the Reading selections or write out calculations next to Mathematics problems. Note: Grade 5 test booklets are not scored. Answers must be transferred to the answer document. (See the section below.)	**Mathematics** **Reading** **Written Composition**
Mark answers in the test booklets. Students may record answers directly onto the test booklets. School testing personnel must transfer answers to the scannable answer sheet. For grade 5, the transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers. Grade 3 students have scannable test booklets.	**Mathematics** **Reading**
Tape recorders may be used to record answers if the student is unable to mark a scannable answer sheet. Answers must be transferred to a scannable answer booklet by school testing personnel. Transfer of answers must be documented (including the names of school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form. Be sure to check the accuracy of any transferred answers.	**Mathematics** **Reading**
Tape recording of the Reading Test may be done in individual testing settings. The student may read the Reading test into a tape recorder. The tape may be replayed by the student as the test is taken.	**Reading**
Tape recording of pre-Writing is permitted in individual testing settings. Students may record their ideas to assist in pre-Writing organization. The students may replay their dictation as they organize their compositions.	**Written Composition**
Scribes may be provided for students whose visual motor responses inhibit their ability to write answers. Scribes must be impartial and should be experienced in transcription. They must write EXACTLY what the student dictates. Students must spell out every word and give punctuation for a scribe to write following the dictation of the composition. Students may be given scripted responses for editing purposes. Personal information must be transferred to a scannable answer sheet by school testing personnel. The transcription must be documented (including the names of school personnel involved) on the Testing Report form.	**Written Composition**
An Abacus may be used in place of a calculator on the calculator portion of the Mathematics test.	**Mathematics**

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Appendix C

Minnesota Assessment Provisions for Students with IEPs and 504 Accommodation Plans

3501.0090 STUDENTS WITH INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANS OR SECTION 504 ACCOMMODATION PLANS.

Subpart 1. **Considerations for students with IEPs or section 504 accom. plans**

A. The IEP or section 504 accommodation plan for a student with a disability shall identify one of the following decisions for each of the Basic requirements:

1. the student is expected to achieve the statewide standard with or without testing accommodations;

2. the student is expected to achieve the statewide standard at an individually modified level of difficulty; or

3. the student is exempt from the statewide standard.

An exemption from the statewide standard shall be granted to a special needs student when the student cannot demonstrate the required degree of learning with appropriate accommodations or modifications if:

1. the student's IEP or section 504 accommodation plan does not and never has included the requirements on which the tests are based; or

2. the student is enrolled in special education classes for the subject matter included in the test, but the student's IEP or section 504 accommodation plan does not include a majority of concepts tested.

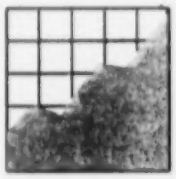
B. Adoption of modifications or exemptions for a student as stated in item A, shall occur concurrently with the adoption of transition goals and objectives as required in Minnesota Statutes, section 120.17, subdivision 3a, clause (1).

Subp. 2. **Testing students with IEPs or section 504 accommodation plans.**

A. All students shall be tested under standard conditions as specified by the developer of the test except those students whose IEPs specify other decisions consistent with subpart 1, item A.

B. Decisions regarding appropriate testing conditions including a decision to provide accommodations for a student with special needs shall be made by the local school district through the IEP process or the section 504 accommodation plan process and shall be reviewed annually.

C. Where subpart 1, item A, subitem (2), applies, the student's IEP or section 504 accommodation plan shall define an appropriate assessment of the statewide standard at a modified level of difficulty. Achievement of the individually modified standard shall be certified only through documented student performance of the defined assessment.



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